

Distributed Operations

In order to capitalize more quickly on our technological advantage in the inherent complexity of the littorals and the anticipated adaptive capability of future enemies present new operational challenges to the Navy-Marine Corps Team. In response, the emerging naval concept for Distributed Operations (DO) is intended to equip Joint Force Commanders with an additive capability to more accurately resolve and immediately respond to ambiguity, while creating confusion for our adversaries. DO are characterized by the ability to physically disperse networked squad-to battalion-sized units over a battlespace extended in both depth and breadth. Contributing to greater situational awareness, capable of precisely directing overwhelming firepower, and readily concentrating to exploit opportunities, Marine forces conducting DO will present a complex puzzle to the adversary and create a competitive advantage for joint warriors.

Like all concepts, DO serves to guide the concentrated development of a range of capabilities. Most obvious, perhaps, are those that will be used to accelerate the speed and quality of networked command and control, collect and disseminate multi-source information, provide mobility and sustainment, and routinely direct precision fires—each around the clock, and in all weather.

More challenging and most critical, however, are those capabilities that will prepare our junior leaders to thrive on a decentralized battlefield. DO requires robust situational awareness, autonomy, and increased freedom of action at lower tactical levels, enabling subordinate commanders to compress decision cycles, seize the initiative, and exploit fleeting opportunities. Training for DO will place a

premium on leadership and decision-making at every level of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), and will demand extensive education, wargaming, and combat simulation investments.

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Concentrated on the forward-deployed Expeditionary Strike Group and its organic Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), or MEU(SOC), in the near term, the current concept is deliberately focused on its application by naval forces to enable early joint operations. As it con-



tinues to evolve, our concept for DO will substantially enhance the capacity of Naval Expeditionary Forces to meet critical capability gaps of the Combatant Commanders across the range of military operations. Marine forces conducting DO will enable actionable intelligence, shape the battlespace or screen for other forces, and direct precise joint fires. DO will add to our current competencies, rather than replace them, by adding selected advanced command-and-control (C2) and Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance systems to our equipment, injecting rigorous training that infuses and exploits a “patrolling” mindset, and focusing on the abilities of our small unit leaders.